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TAGS: [IS KMDR MEDIA REACTION REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast
2. Iran Nuclear Program

Key stories in the media:

Israel Radio reported that the U.S. has no information regarding the achievement of a framework agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, as indicated in reports coming out from Cairo -- through Egypt's Middle East News Agency (MENA) -- that are cited in all major media. Reporting that Israeli officials played down the reports from Cairo that progress was being made in behind-the-scenes negotiations, Jerusalem Post nevertheless quoted a source in Sharon's bureau as saying that elements in those reports are true. Israel Radio quoted GOI sources as saying that the reports are meant to assuage frustration among the Egyptian public regarding the release of convicted spy Azzam Azzam, and to prepare Egyptian public opinion to the return of an Egyptian ambassador to Israel.

Ha'aretz reported that during his current visit to Kuwait Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak is trying to persuade Kuwaiti ruler Prince Jabber Ahmed el Sabah to open negotiations with Israel for diplomatic ties and to pressure Syria to demonstrate more daring diplomatic moves that will persuade Israel of Damascus's seriousness about renewing the diplomatic process with Israel. Israel Radio cited Israel's acknowledgment that Egypt has launched a cease-fire initiative, but said that PM Sharon has set the first stage of the road map, i.e. the cessation of Palestinian terror, as the precondition for talks with the Palestinians. The radio also quoted GOI officials as saying that Egypt is trying to convene a conference in Washington this summer with the participation of Israel, the Palestinians, the U.S., and Egypt. Leading media quoted GOI sources as saying that Israel would respond to quiet with quiet.

Maariv (Ben Caspit) reported that Elliott Abrams, Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director of the National Security Council for Near East and North African Affairs, recently told Jewish leaders at a private meeting in Washington that the U.S. is concerned about recent reports about the conduct of IDF troops at roadblocks, that it is opposed to even the slightest delay in the disengagement calendar, and that it views any settlement beyond the separation fence as slated for evacuation.

IDF Radio reported that the U.S. is accusing official Israeli representatives of trying to obtain technological and intelligence information in a way that can be termed spying. The station quoted senior GOI sources as saying that the tension over this matter stems from cultural differences. In another development, Jerusalem Post reported that members of the U.S. Congress have expressed anger and dismay over Sunday's report in the newspaper describing how the FBI set up the pro-Israel lobby AIPAC. Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-NY), who is one of the members of Congress whose demand for a briefing on the matter by the Justice Department has not been answered, was quoted as saying in an interview with Jerusalem Post: "I think it's very disconcerting to think that an investigating agency of the U.S., while investigating the alleged misdeeds of a [Pentagon] employee [Franklin], would look to cut some kind of deal with him if they believe he committed a

crime and to give him a better deal if they could." Ackerman reportedly added: "They are trying at any length to disrupt the work of a very prestigious American organization that advocates American foreign policy in the Middle East for a better relationship with Israel."

Leading media reported that jailed Tanzim leader Marwan Barghouti is considering withdrawing his candidacy for PA chairman.

The media reported on disagreements in the IDF and Israeli society regarding the conduct of IDF troops in the territories. Yediot led with a protest letter written by parents of soldiers serving in the elite naval commando (Sayeret): "Our Sons Are Not Murderers." Israel Radio quoted Sayeret reservists as saying that the "neighbor procedure," in which the IDF orders a Palestinian to instruct a person whom the army wants to arrest to leave his house, is still being carried out despite a ban by the High Court of Justice.

The major media reported that Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu told Sharon Tuesday that he supports the plan to bring the Labor Party into the coalition, and that he has instructed his followers in the Likud Central Committee to vote in favor of the plan. Ha'aretz reported on inactivity among anti-disengagement forces within the Likud, which expect Sharon to win the vote in the committee Thursday. Ha'aretz also reported that Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres intends to convene the party's executive committee on Saturday night to obtain its approval to start coalition talks with the Likud, if the Likud's convention votes in favor of Labor's entry into the government.

The electronic media reported that this morning, anti-tank missiles landed next to a kindergarten in the northern Gaza Strip settlement of Nissanit, and that a mortar shell was launched at a settlement in the southern strip. Israel Radio reported that Hizbullah is attempting to recruit activists in the Gaza Strip, as it has done in the northern West Bank. Hatzofe reported that for the first time the Palestinians have dug a tunnel from the Gaza Strip into Israel. Ha'aretz, Yediot and Jerusalem Post reported that the IDF is probing the killing of a 15-year-old Palestinian boy last March by troops who were on a hike in the Gaza Strip. Jerusalem Post reported that the PA Police have refused to launch a joint investigation of the case with the Israeli authorities.

Ha'aretz reported that security forces arrested 41 Israeli left-wing activists who were participating in a demonstration against the separation fence Tuesday near the West Bank village of Budrus. Leading media reported that the IDF prevented a delegation of Peace Now and left-wing Knesset members from completing their visit Tuesday to a street being paved between Jerusalem and the West Bank settlement of Nokdim, south of Bethlehem.

Ha'aretz quoted official Iranian sources as saying that they have information about Pakistan and Saudi Arabia signing an agreement in 2003 in which Pakistan promised to help Saudi Arabia develop nuclear weapons and the missiles to deliver them.

Israel Radio cited a Washington Post story citing the conclusion of U.S. military intelligence officials that the Iraqi insurgency is being directed from Syria to a greater degree than previously recognized,

Jerusalem Post quoted Majde al-Khalidi, a senior PA Foreign Ministry official, as saying that the PA will be seeking to obtain USD 400 million from the international donor states about to convene in Norway, in order to reconstruct its security apparatus. The newspaper also quoted senior PA officials in Ramallah as saying Tuesday that a high-level Palestinian delegation is expected to visit the Gulf region next week to ask for hundreds of millions of dollars in financial aid for the PA. Israel Radio reported that PLO Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) and Palestinian PM Ahmed Qurei (Abu Ala) will meet with the Lebanese leadership in Beirut today.

Jerusalem Post reported that in a radical departure from years of French critical rhetoric, the French Ambassador to Israel, Gerard Araud, told the newspaper on Tuesday that he thought Israel "has tried to show the utmost restraint" in the course of the conflict with the Palestinians since 2000.

Maariv, Jerusalem Post and Hatzofe reported that Tuesday the Knesset approved the granting of Israeli

citizenship to former South Lebanon Army (SLA) fighters and their family members who live in Israel.

Maariv reported that Tuesday Likud MK Ayub Kara presented a bill draft to the Knesset, according to which the state would compensate Azzam Azzam with 96 monthly salary payments -- the number of months he served in an Egyptian prison. If adopted, the law could be the basis for the compensation of people who were jailed abroad for being Israelis.

I1. Mideast:

Summary:

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "The right thing to do is well familiar to [Shimon Peres]: to change his mind by tomorrow and explain why he is in favor of supporting disengagement from outside the government, retreating from the problematic intention of joining the Sharon government."

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized: "We would like to hear Peres argue ... that the way to help the Palestinian leadership confront violence is to hold them to high standards, and that low standards actually fan the flames of radicalism."

Moshe Elad, who was the first head of the joint security mechanism with the PA, writes in Ha'aretz: "The Israeli government has never tried to initiate a positive change in Palestinian society. Maybe the time has come for it.... The instrument through which this can be done is the Palestinian elections for president."

Conservative columnist Nadav Haetzni wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "The positive 'signals' received from the Arab states, which 'ambassador' Sharon will boast about at the Likud Convention, are akin to the satisfaction of a wolf that has just devoured a sheep."

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized: "Where is the only person of conscience among the Palestinian public who will speak about the 'purity of arms' [an Israeli military concept advocating limited force and the humane treatment of enemy prisoners and noncombatants]?"

Block Quotes:

II. "Lose to Win"

Liberal columnist Gideon Samet wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 8): "The Labor Party's entry into the government under the current circumstances will be of no little shame for Peres and his party. As ministers, they will be small pawns on a board on which Sharon is playing until he decides to checkmate them.... In the best of all possible cases, to please the international ear and the eye of the Israeli majority, the disengagement will start with something. When it encounters its first anticipated difficulties, perhaps even blood on the TV screens, it will get stuck, together with the losers from Labor.... Say what you want about Peres, he's a serious, experienced man. The right thing to do is well familiar to him: to change his mind by tomorrow and explain why he is in favor of supporting disengagement from outside the government, retreating from the problematic intention of joining the Sharon government. One thing is certain in this vote: He will surely come out a winner."

II. "Where's the New Peres?"

Conservative, independent Jerusalem Post editorialized (December 8): "There is ... a fundamental difference between the two leaders [Sharon and Peres], beyond their disputes on specific issues. The difference is that Sharon, by proposing disengagement, embracing the goal of Palestinian statehood and calling the status quo 'occupation,' has dramatically changed course.... By contrast, there is no new Peres.... Peres has been defeated at the polls more times than perhaps any leader in our history. Yet he has never shown any doubt as to the rightness of his path.... Some say the mistake of Oslo was the idea behind it, others blame

only the bet on Yasser Arafat as a partner. Without resolving this debate, there should be no obstacle to agreeing that it was a mistake, once it became clear that Arafat was not complying, to make excuses for him and accuse anyone who blew the whistle of 'weakening Arafat' and threatening peace. We would like to hear -- not just from Sharon, but from Peres -- that that mistake will not be made again, that he will not say that demanding an end to terror and incitement 'weakens Abu Mazen.' We would like to hear Peres argue the opposite: that the way to help the Palestinian leadership confront violence is to hold them to high standards, and that low standards actually fan the flames of radicalism. We have a new Sharon. Will we have a new Peres?"

III. "When the Likud Applauds Peres"

Conservative columnist Nadav Haetzni wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (December 8): "The actual significance of the package of achievements Sharon has arranged for Mubarak is a modification of the strategic balance in southern Israel. God forbid, it could also brew the next war with Egypt: after the withdrawal from Katif [in the Gaza Strip], any Israeli retaliatory action against the launching of missiles from Gaza, could be viewed as a declaration of war against Egypt.... All told, the positive 'signals' received from the Arab states, which 'ambassador' Sharon will boast about at the Likud Convention, are akin to the satisfaction of a wolf that has just devoured a sheep.... Peres and Chamberlain have patented this formula.... Thus, on Thursday, after the members of the convention listen to the Prime Minister's listing of achievements, they will have to decide whether they will finally turn Jabotinsky House [the Likud headquarters] into another version of the Peres Center For Peace."

IV. "Time For a Positive Change"

Moshe Elad, who was the first head of the joint security mechanism with the PA, writes in Ha'aretz (December 8): "The sounds of joy Israelis are making about 'seeing positive signs' in the Palestinian leadership, and particularly in the Islamic bloc, should be regarded with a considered degree of caution. It's not peace they are talking about over there, but about freedom for the prisoners, lifting the checkpoints, and work permits.... For clear reasons, mostly the continuing terrorism, the Israeli government has never tried to initiate a positive change in Palestinian society. Maybe the time has come for it.... The instrument through which this can be done is the Palestinian elections for president. Before the pressure on Israel begins to mount, before a spectacular terror attack by the association of opponents of peace torpedoes the last bit of willingness to turn a new page, it would be wise if at our own initiative we responded to those signals. If there is any chance for a change in the position of the Palestinian public toward Israel and an end to terrorism, it does not go through Abu Mazen's office nor even Marwan Barghouti's cell. It passes, whether we like it or not, through the gates of the Shata Prison and at the Hawara checkpoint."

V. "Purity of Arms"

Nationalist, Orthodox Hatzofe editorialized (December 8): "[IDF soldiers] have carried out exceptional deeds every few years; all those who took part in them are paying dearly and publicly for them, which represent 99 percent of the cases perpetrated in the fight against an enemy who attacks in order to kill.... Hundreds of terrorists attend each funeral of a senior Hamas member. Common and existential sense suggests that all those murderers be sprayed with weapon fire. However, Israel will never do such a thing, which could have saved a considerable amount of Jewish blood. In contrast to this humanism, mean Palestinian terrorists have not hesitated to open fire at mourners who had come to the [Gaza Strip] Gush Katif cemetery in order to honor the memory of the terror victims. Where is the only person of conscience among the Palestinian public who will speak about the 'purity of arms' [an Israeli military concept advocating limited force and the humane treatment of enemy prisoners and noncombatants]?"

12. Iran Nuclear Program:

Summary:

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "While the world is preoccupied with Iranian nuclear activity ... Iran says: 'You're only looking at us, but here are two friends of the United States who are working together through an accord to develop a nuclear program.'"

Block Quotes:

"Iran Attempts Distraction"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (December 8): "After the board of directors at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) recently announced that the board welcomed Iran's decision to freeze all activities connected with uranium enrichment, a news item appeared in Tehran quoting official sources who claimed that Saudi Arabia and Pakistan had joined forces to develop a military nuclear program.... What prompted Iran to issue this piece of news? While the world is preoccupied with Iranian nuclear activity, with the pressures that European countries are putting on Iran, with the American demands to transfer the issue to the United Nations Security Council, Iran says: 'You're only looking at us, but here are two friends of the United States who are working together through an accord to develop a nuclear program.' Unlike the past, this time the Iranians did not accuse Israel -- falsely -- as the cause for their nuclear development, but rather two large Muslim countries. Thus the message is that the U.S. is employing a double standard and wants to harm Iran's efforts to develop energy."

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